

# THE CHINTHE



## SPRING 2019

656 SQUADRON ASSOCIATION  
JOURNAL

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# **PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

**Piers Lewis**

So as 2019 comes sharply into view, along with a recent dose of snow causing the first use of the snow chains this year to dig our Passat out of my daughters school car park, I reflected on the Squadrons amazing achievement of the first AH flight in Arctic conditions from Bardufoss, Norway. For me, this all started 6 years ago when I persuaded the CO at the time into allowing a 'beefed-up' recce to go out to Norway, conduct cold weather survival training, and researching an approach to AH operations for environmental training and live firing. This duly happened, and allowed the road-map to be initiated. Knowing what I knew at the time of the significant difficulties of operations in such adverse conditions, I have utmost respect for the whole team which overcame these hurdles, and more, to get yet another First for 656 Sqn AAC.

I am also personally very pleased to see Maj Huw Raikes at the helm of the Sqn now as OC. When I was in the role, Huw was the 4 Regiment Operations Officer, and, without blowing the proverbial smoke anywhere, he made an outstanding addition to the RHQ team, hence I both guarantee his G3/5 focus will be laser sharp now, but also that his own Ops Officer will be under some level of pressure!

Back to the present and past. Last November saw a good few of us at the Cenotaph again for the Armistice celebrations Remembrance Sunday parade, and again, we all failed to keep step at some point (well, I know I did!). I am sure many of us were very busy that weekend with many other local commitments. I, for one, met up with a large number of service personnel I didn't even know existed in my small village, and turns out that one such person, living just over the hill from me, was with me in Afghanistan on the first tour in 2006, and as co-incidence would have it, I had only been talking about him 2 weeks before with some parents of my daughters friends. It is truly a unique and strong bond we all hold with our ex-military brethren, and, even if we have never met then before, the kinsman spirit in us, always finds common ground. As for the Cenotaph, I know there were a few saying that that would be their last appearance there. Although this saddens me, it is entirely understandable, and, as I reflected at the significantly increased numbers from younger generation this year, I gave rise to an optimism that next year, a few more who have never been there before, might join us for, what is always, a very moving, striking, and incredible proud moment.

On other matters, the committee have also managed to come together recently to look at some of the more pressing issues, especially pertinent noting last years failed reunion and also the recent survey responses – more to follow at the AGM at Wattisham this June. However, one key point agreed on was the establishment of a

new role in the committee; that of Chairman. This new role will work alongside myself as the President to be empowered to take important decisions and issue direction for the progression of the Association and its members. I am delighted to inform you that Bob Thorpe has agreed to do this in an interim capacity until the AGM when we will look to formalise the role on an enduring basis. As many of you are aware, Bob comes with a depth of experience, not only from the energy and effort he already commits to the committee, but also from his other ventures working for the Scouts in his other spare time.

Finally, as the nights get shorter, and the days get longer, we are moving ever closer to a couple of great events for the Association. Firstly, the Not Forgotten Association event in Buckingham Palace in May (please send your nominations to Terry) and also the annual reunion this year, back, again, with the Squadron at their current home in Wattisham. Historically, this is always the best attended event, and with the Squadron, in such a great position now at the heart of the Apache Helicopter Force, and in the wake of the WW1 100 years, I look forward to seeing as many of you there as possible

**STOP PRESS – NOT FORGOTTEN ASSOCIATION GARDEN PARTY 23<sup>RD</sup> MAY 2019**

Apologies for such short notice, however the Association has just received information regarding the “Not Forgotten Association” Garden Party which is going to take place on the 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2019 between 2pm and 5.15pm at Buckingham Palace.

Those veterans in receipt of a War Pension or who have received compensation for an injury whilst serving are eligible to attend. Further details can be found of their website at [www.nfassociation.org](http://www.nfassociation.org)

**The deadline I am afraid, for nominations is 11<sup>th</sup> March 2019 and I fully appreciate this is very short notice. Anyone wishing to attend and who meets the criteria to attend please contact me by phone or email as soon as possible.**

Terry M Betchley  
Secretary

# **SECRETARY'S REPORT**

## **Terry Betchley**

Dear All

It has been sometime since the Secretary has made any form of report for the Chinthe and since I took over in July 2017 I feel it was about time I put pen to paper so's to speak.

I must mention some recent changes in the committee as this has had a direct effect on various aspects of the Associations activities over the past year.

Our new President Piers Lewis has been guiding us all through some relatively unstable times especially with regard to these recent changes.

I must mention and record my sincere gratitude to John Bennett who has served and supported the Association in many forms over many years, especially as editor of the Chinthe. Time to rest up John, put the pen down and turn off the computer. We welcome our new editor, Bill Williams to the fold and this copy of the Chinthe comes to you thanks to his hard work.

I would never be able too fill the shoes of the late Sylvia Heyes as Secretary but do hope I can offer a degree of support to you all and the committee. Please feel free to contact me regarding any matter and I will do my very best to help in any way.

Mike Chrichton-Kane takes over the running of the website and I know he has been hard at work doing this. Welcome on board Mike.

George McKie is the new treasurer, having taken over from Mark. I am sure there will be a smooth transition into the post. Mark having done a fantastic and conscientious job over the last years.

It is hoped that this year's AGM/Reunion will take place with the Squadron at Wattisham on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2019 and the details are in the following pages. Please may I ask that you complete the return and send it to me as soon as possible. Regrettably last years event had to be cancelled due to lack of numbers attending but I do hope that as many of you will join us at Wattisham.

The Cenotaph parade I know is not until November and the Royal British Legion will not me asking me for names until May but I thought it prudent to pre-empt the request by asking for names as sson as possible. A form for names is in this copy of the Chinthe as the next issue will not be due until Autumn. So if you wish to attend please complete the form and return to me so that I can start planning ahead.

If you have details on any other events that the Association would be able to attend or you have any ideas for future events please do contact me or any member of the committee.

Finally may I take this opportunity to wish you all a healthy, happy and prosperous new year.

# 2018 Members Survey

Bob Thorpe

During 2018 we asked members, who have agreed to be contact by email, to complete a short survey on what they would like to get out of being members of such a unique Association.

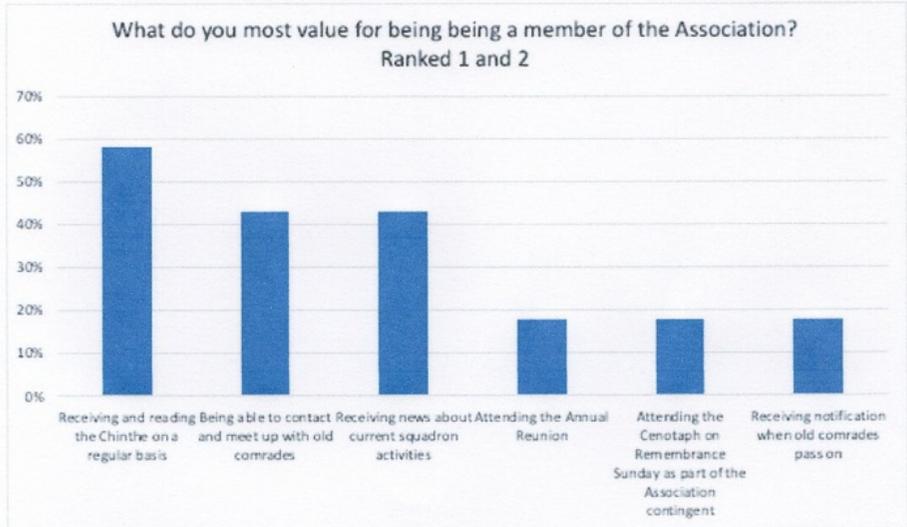
I sent the survey to 197 members and we had a very credible response of over 50%. The over-whelming feeling seems to be that you were pleased to be a member and that generally you felt your committee did a good job.

We asked a total of 10 questions and, in hindsight, I would have designed the survey differently as analysis has not been easy with some of the questions and responses. I was particularly amused that 10 of you said you could be persuaded to join the committee but I forgot to ask your names (it was an anonymous survey). Schoolboy error!!

So for those of you who feel you could give some time to help develop and grow the Association do drop me an email!

The questions we asked were:

1. **WHAT DO YOU MOST VALUE FOR BEING A MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATION? PLEASE RANK IN**



**ORDER OF VALUE TO YOU.**

*Please note that the graph for both this question and the second question does not add up to 100%. This is because the percentage shows those who ranked the element either 1 or 2. Please therefore do not chase me up over my mathematics!!*

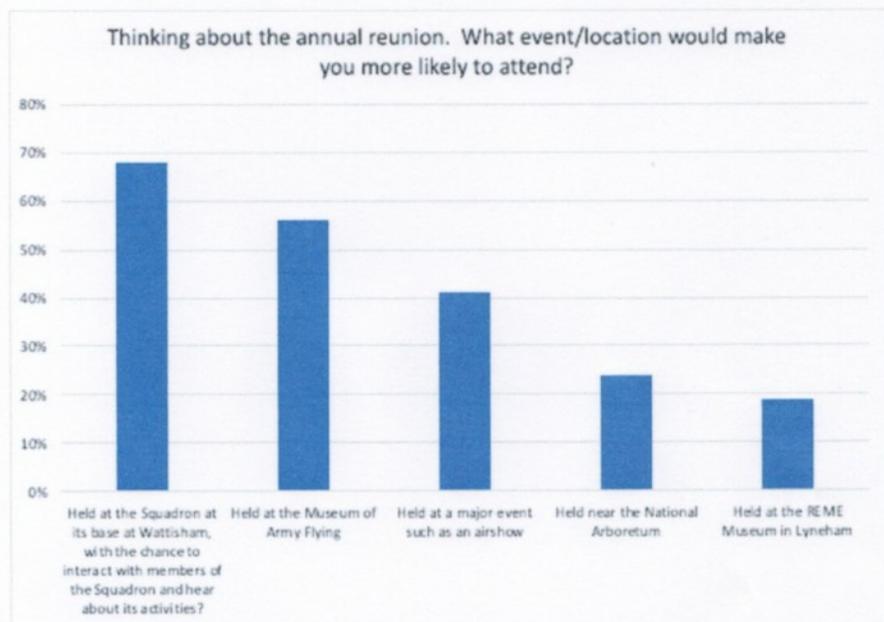
Interestingly the most highly ranked 'value' was around the Chinthe yet when we call for articles it sometimes seems as if we are 'pulling teeth'. So if you want to continue to receive an informative journal twice a year get out the pen and paper. I have started a new series in this edition called 'Notes from the

Front Line'. This will be a series of short stories/anecdotes from members 'who were there'. Short or long, send me some stories. Don't forget the photos!

Meeting up and contacting old comrades ranked fairly high and yet less than 20% seemed to see the annual reunion and the Cenotaph as of high value. Im not sure how to take that one!

However we always have a contingent at the Cenotaph and having attended twice I urge everyone to attend at least once. It is an amazing experience. Don't worry if you have mobility issues; quite rightly, there is no issue with wheelchair marchers.

News about the current active Squadron was also highly rated and Terry and I are meeting with the OC, Major Huw Raikes, and our liaison officer, Captain Matt Collings, on 29th March. We will discuss with Huw and Matt how we can keep you all more up to date.



## 2. THINKING ABOUT THE ANNUAL REUNION. WHAT EVENT/LOCATION WOULD MAKE YOU MORE LIKELY TO ATTEND?

Whilst Wattisham was favoured by a large number of you, we are aware that it is a challenge for some people to get there. We favour continuing to hold it at the Squadron every two years but will look at other options in the intervening year. We will probably hold next year's Reunion at the Army Flying Museum. This is going to be a fantastic experience when it reopens on 1st April.

We will also look at other locations and will also look at other get-togethers in other parts of the country. Maybe drinks and dinner organised regionally a couple of times a year. We will keep you posted.

**3. WHERE ELSE OR WHAT OTHER EVENT WOULD YOU LIKE TO ATTEND AS A MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATION?**

Not everyone answered this questions but there were a number of people who mentioned these events listed below. They are in a rough order:

- Other aviation museums; Duxford, Shuttleworth Collection etc.
- Fly-ins
- Airshows such as IAT, Middle Wallop etc. - maybe members tent
- AAC Days/Events
- Events held in the central area of UK or rotated through different locations
- Linked to International Auster Club events

We will look at this and offer some different events in other parts of the country.

**4. WHAT WOULD MAKE YOU MORE LIKELY TO ATTEND AN EVENT ORGANISED BY YOUR COMMITTEE?**

The major theme that came out here was a location close to Member's home. This fits with the request that we had events in different parts of the country

Other requests included

- Reunions relevant to certain periods e.g. 70s, 80s
- Mix with current pilots and being able to have a go on the simulator!
- Weekend event
- Discounted hotels
- Transport organised

Again we'll look at this and see what we can arrange.

**5. WHAT ELSE DO YOU WANT TO GET OUT OF BEING A MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATION?**

A real mix of answers here but the key ones were:

- News of present and former members
- Lecture/more information on history of the squadron
- Very happy with what the association does
- Keeping up to date with the squadron activities

Obviously we can only give news when we hear it from you so please let us know as we tend to only hear about those who have passed away. As regards lectures and more information on the history of the Squadron we have agreed to deliver and sponsor a series of lectures at the Army Flying Museum in 2020. If there is enough demand we could consider doing some regional lectures as well.

6. **WOULD YOU LIKE TO HEAR NEWS FROM OTHER RELATED ORGANISATIONS, SUCH AS MUSEUM OF ARMY FLYING, AACVA, INTERNATIONAL AUSTRALIAN CLUB AND OTHER EVENTS SUCH AS FLY-INS?**

82% said yes so we'll try to do better and sort this out.

7. **IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS, HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU VISITED OUR WEBSITE? AND**
8. **IF WE MADE THE WEBSITE MORE DYNAMIC WITH RELEVANT INFORMATION SUCH AS EVENTS, ACTIVITIES FROM ASSOCIATED ORGANISATIONS AND POSSIBLY NEWS FROM THE SQUADRON WOULD YOU BE MORE LIKELY TO VISIT THE WEB SITE REGULARLY?**

Not really sure why I asked these questions but it was interesting that some of our members visited the site regularly and others not at all. However 92% have said that would spend more time on it should we make it more dynamic.

The good news here is that Mike Kane, who served as a Scout Pilot in the late 70s and early 80s, has taken on the role of webmaster. He clearly understands what he is doing (I confess I more than struggled!) and you will see some great progress over the next few months.

9. **WHAT IS THE BEST THING ABOUT BEING A MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATION AND WHAT IS THE WORST?**

In terms of good things there was a general feeling that we were doing a good job in keeping the Association going and people were proud to have served with the Squadron.

The most amusing answer was the member saying the best thing was "Being alive" and therefore able to be a member.

Overwhelmingly members said the worst thing was hearing about the passing of old comrades

However a few also said we need to be more dynamic in keeping members up to date with new of the squadron and members activities.

Secondly there were a good proportion that said they wanted to hear less about Malaya and more about more recent squadron activities and operations.

We take this 'all on board' but reiterate "send us the stories and we'll publish them!"

10. **FINALLY, MIGHT WE BE ABLE TO PERSUADE YOU TO JOIN THE COMMITTEE AND HELP THE ASSOCIATION THRIVE?**

Schoolboy error not asking for names. Come on you guys, if you can spare a few hours a month, help us out on the committee. We cannot do it all ourselves!

## **Committee Meeting 2nd February 2019**

Your committee held a much overdue meeting on 2nd February in Milton Keynes. Present at the meeting were:

Terry Betchley, Secretary

Mike Kane, Webmaster

George Mckie, Treasurer

Bob Thorpe, Membership Secretary

Apologies were received from Piers Lewis, President, Derek Walker, Assistant Treasurer and David Williams, Chinthe Editor.

The following matters were discussed and decisions made:

### Item 1 – Committee Composition

It was agreed that the President of the Association should, wherever possible be a former OC of the Squadron. The President could be a serving or retired officer. However, the committee recognised that this would mean that often the President could not be as hands on as required and that therefore there was a need for a Chairperson within the committee

It was also agreed that the Chair person could not be the OC of the Squadron due to the workload. This post could be doubled with another appointment but it was agreed that the position would be responsible with the committee, for the day to day management of the Association and, most importantly for growing the membership.

It was agreed that an acting Chairperson would be appointed by the Committee until the AGM. Bob Thorpe has agreed to take on this role. At the AGM the post of Chairperson would be proposed, ratified and elected.

It was also agreed that the current constitution with amendments for the Chairperson role be ratified at the AGM in June by the membership.

That a younger member currently serving in the Squadron and not of commissioned rank be co-opted to the committee if possible.

The Squadron Association Liaison Officer be an exofficio member of the committee.

#### Item 2 Treasurers Report

The Treasurer went through the accounts, which are reasonable healthy. The full accounts will be presented at the AGM on 21st June.

#### Item 3 Reunion/AGM

This was discussed and we have now confirmed the details with the Squadron. Details are shown elsewhere in the Chinthe.

#### Item 4 Chinthe Publication

We now have a new interim editor, David Williams.

#### Item 5 Survey Results

Members may recall a survey carried out by email last year. The results of this survey are shown elsewhere in the Chinthe. However the committee took note of the results and will be taking action on a. Number of requests by members.

#### Item 6 Website

We have a new webmaster, Mike Kane, who has done a great deal of work on the website. We will update you further at the AGM.

#### Item 7 Future Events

As a result of the survey we clearly need to have other events across the country rather than just relying on Wattisham and the Middle wallop area. Your committee will investigate this and report at the AGM.

#### Item 8 Recruitment

We discussed how to get more members into the Association, particularly those from more recent eras. Ideas will be discussed with the OC and Liaison Officer and we will report back at the AGM

# **Remembrance Sunday 2018**

As we are all aware 2018 was the 100th Anniversary since the end of the First World War. It was particularly poignant, then, that 24 members of the Association gathered together on Horse Guards Parade to take part in the Royal British Legion Remembrance Service at the Cenotaph.

The weather was kind to us and, despite puddles of water on Horse Guards, the rain held off throughout the ceremony. The Good Lord looks after the righteous or perhaps the Devil looks after his own. Whichever it was we were all thankful to remain dry and reasonably warm!

On a more serious note, the meeting with old comrades and the remembering of those, who didn't make it back, is a cathartic experience. It should be done at least once in a lifetime. This was my second year at the Cenotaph and it never ceases to move me.

After marching onto Whitehall, we waited for the start of the ceremony whilst chatting to old friends both Army Air Corps and in my case, Royal Corps of Transport, who lined up behind us. We were able to take part in the service through speakers lining the street and see the laying of wreaths by the great and the good on the large screens.



Finally it was time to march off. Derek Walker helped us keep in step, although I have to say, I think we were better at flying and operating aircraft than marching!

Large crowds lined the streets and clapped and cheered as we marched past. Quite amazing! However, this year we missed Ross Skingley, who spent much of the march last year breaking off to chat up the pretty girls.

Finally we marched past the Princess Royal, who took the salute in Horse Guards. We all marched taller and prouder at that point.

After a few photographs on Horse Guards, we set off for lunch near Charing Cross before leaving for home around mid afternoon. On a personal note on the walk to the restaurant I bumped into an old friend, a Tiger (Royal Hampshire, a regiment I was privileged to have served with during my infantry attachment in Ballykelly with some 40 odd years ago), who I had not seen for 30 years.



If you have not marched at the Cenotaph, then Terry Betchley is coordinating our involvement this year and I urge you to put your name down. We will be limited on numbers and it will be, as usual, 'first come, first served'

Bob Thorpe



## **Reunion and AGM 2019**

We are delighted to confirm that this year's reunion and AGM will be hosted by the Squadron at Wattisham Airfield.

The OC, Major Huw Raikes, and our liaison officer, Captain Matt Collings are very keen to maintain the contact between the Association and the active Squadron. As such they are determined to make it a great day for everyone.

We are currently sorting out all the finer details and Terry Betchley and I will be meeting with Huw and Matt on Friday 29th March to finalise the planning. However the day is planned to start at 10:45 in the Squadron lines. The day will include a briefing on the Squadron's current activities, an update on the Apache and future developments including the new Echo model of the aircraft, a visit to the simulator and time to interact with all ranks of the Squadron. There will be a BBQ lunch with the Squadron and in the evening the Squadron officers will host a dinner in the Officers' Mess. We will also hold a short AGM during the day.

We have looked at local hotels to get a deal for members but we still think the most convenient and cost effective rooms are available at the Premier Inn North Ipswich, Paper Mill Lane, Claydon, Ipswich IP6 0BE. They have unfortunately refused to give a Group rate that makes any sense for either members or the Association. We therefore suggest you book the hotel through [premierinn.co.uk](http://premierinn.co.uk) as early as possible to secure the most favourable rate. At the time of writing this they are offering fully refundable rooms for £38 and nonrefundable rooms for £29.

We will provide coach transport to and from the Premier Inn for the dinner in the Mess. If you wish to stay anywhere other than the Premier Inn please arrange your own transport.

Prices for the event are:

Lunch at the Squadron £6.00 per head

Dinner, which includes the coach, £30 per head. Unfortunately we cannot offer a discount for those who wish to travel to the dinner by their own means.

Please therefore let us know whether you wish to attend by either completing the proforma below or sending an email to Terry Betchley, [t.betchley@sky.com](mailto:t.betchley@sky.com). Please do not forget any dietary requirements. We need to confirm names and details to the Squadron by 20th May 2019 and we will require payment before that date to confirm your attendance. As before we are happy to accept bank transfer or cheques.

We will send out further details regarding the full programme to all those who have confirmed their attendance in mid May. Please make sure you have included your email address on the booking form.

We look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at Wattisham on 21st June.

**656 SQUADRON ASSOCIATION REUNION RETURNS FORM 2019**

Name of main contact for your party: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Association Open Day - Friday 21st June (1100-1600)**  
Wattisham Airfield, IP7 7RA

I wish to attend the Open Day (includes a BBQ lunch): Yes/No

Names of additional guests: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Cost £6.00 per head for BBQ Lunch .....

***Photo ID will be required for each person wishing to attend.***

**2. Reunion Dinner - Friday 21st June (1900-2300)**  
Officers' Mess, Wattisham

I wish to attend the Reunion Dinner: Yes/No

Names of additional guests: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I/we have the following  
dietary requirements:

\_\_\_\_\_

**3. Coach between hotel & Mess - Friday 21st June (1830-2300),**  
Premier Inn Ipswich North IP6 0BE

I wish to book a seat on the coach: \_\_\_\_\_

Names of additional passengers: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The coach leaves the Premier Inn at 1830, and leaves the Mess for the return journey at 2300.

***Photo IDs will be required for you and your guests if you drive your own car to the dinner.***

#### 4. AGM – Fri 21<sup>st</sup> June 2019 – Wattisham Airfield

Names of those attending the AGM (all are welcome, but only members may vote):

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#### 5. Payment

Numbers attending Open Day & lunch at £6 per head \_\_\_\_\_ Cost: \_\_\_\_\_

Numbers attending Dinner at £30 per head \_\_\_\_\_ Cost: \_\_\_\_\_

Total due: \_\_\_\_\_

I wish to pay by cheque (YES/NO) \_\_\_\_\_

Make your cheque payable to "656 Squadron Association" and post it with this completed form to:

Mr George McKie  
Markfield Court  
Markfield Retirement Village  
Leicestershire  
NP15 9SB

Or

Terry M Betchley  
7 Barn Meadow  
Combs  
Stowmarket  
Suffolk  
IP14 2QG

I wish to pay by online transfer (YES/NO) \_\_\_\_\_

Print & complete this form, then either post it to George at the address above, or scan & email it to him at:

[Georgemckie5646@gmail.com](mailto:Georgemckie5646@gmail.com)

Or

[t.betchley@sky.com](mailto:t.betchley@sky.com)

We will acknowledge receipt of online payments by email; make your payment to:

NatWest Account Name: 656 Squadron Association  
Sort Code: 60-12-34  
Account Number: 51137135  
Reference: Your surname

#### 6. The Premier Inn, Ipswich North

This hotel is 9 miles from Wattisham Airfield, and 5 miles North of Ipswich, at the junction of the A14 and B1113. Book through [premierinn.co.uk](http://premierinn.co.uk)

Premier Inn (Ipswich North)  
Paper Mill Lane  
Ipswich  
Suffolk, IP6 0BE

Remove this page, Complete the form and return ASAP

Application to attend the

Annual Parade at the Cenotaph

(There could be a restriction on numbers)

Please return by 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019

To  
Terry Betchley  
7 Barn Meadow  
Combs  
STOWMARKET  
Suffolk

**REMEMBRANCE PARADE CONTINGENT RETURN**  
**SUNDAY 10<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2019**

Full Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Post Code \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

I wish to join the 656 Squadron Contingent at the Cenotaph Ceremony on  
Remembrance Sunday

(Form up on Horse Guards Parade by 1000 Hrs  
Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> November 2019)

The following information will be required:

Military Service Number \_\_\_\_\_

Title/Rank \_\_\_\_\_

First Name \_\_\_\_\_

Last Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

Place of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

**Please ensure full details are correct**

Do you wish to join the party for lunch in a local restaurant **YES/NO**

**This page could be filled with your story.**

We all have tales, and photographs of experiences within the Squadron, regardless of which theatre you served in. Please take some time out and forward your reminiscences to either the Secretary, or Membership secretary.

**Remember this Journal is for your information and entertainment.  
We need your input**

## **Army Flying Museum**

Middle Wallop, Stockbridge

Hamshire SO20 8DY

[www.armyflying.com](http://www.armyflying.com)

T 01264 781086

E [info@armyflying.com](mailto:info@armyflying.com)

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FUNDRAISING  
REGULATOR

# ***Army Flying Museum***

Derek Walker and I visited the Museum of Army Flying (soon to be reopened as the Army Flying Museum) to meet with the Chief Executive, Chris Munns, and the Curator, Susan Lindsay. The aim of the meeting was to discuss a donation from the Association to the Museum; something that was promised but never delivered some years ago.

Chris and Sue gave us a tour of the revamped Museum, which is still very much work in progress, but it is going to be fantastic. The work being undertaken by Chris' team is amazing and I, personally, cannot wait to visit it after the grand reopening on 1st April.

This, however, has not been an inexpensive revamp and clearly the Museum is going to need financial support for some time to come despite the large Lottery grant. Since much of the history of Army Flying is inextricably linked to 656 Squadron, we should definitely be at the forefront of both fund raising and promotion.

The committee has therefore agreed to immediately donate £500 and we will be seeking your approval for further funding and/or fund raising at our AGM in June.

We have asked, however, that in some way the Museum also helps promote 656 Squadron Association, as it is vital we grow the membership as none of us is getting any younger.

We have agreed that, as a first step, the Association will sponsor and arrange delivery of a number of monthly lectures held at the Museum in 2020. These lectures will be about the history of 656 at war and peace; something our members have been urging us to arrange. I will probably lead a lecture concerning our Rhodesia adventure, Operation Agila, and I would really like someone to step forward and lead a lecture on the Malaya era. Other subjects could be around more recent operations.

Secondly we will hold our 2020 Annual Reunion and AGM at the Museum, subject to ratification at this year's AGM on 21st June.

Thirdly we will promote the Museum's events and may even take a table at one of the biannual fundraising dinners held at the Museum.

In return for this support the Museum will allow us to distribute flyers giving information about the Association and its aims. I also hope that we can more prominently link our websites.

Finally the Museum is looking for volunteers to act as guides for members of the public visiting the Museum. If you live near Middle Wallop and fancy telling the public about the 'Magnificent Men (and Women) in their Flying Machines' then drop an email to Jen Parker at

[volunteering@armyflying.com](mailto:volunteering@armyflying.com). There is an initial volunteers training session being set up in March.

*Bob Thorpe*

# Borneo Memories

Brian Rigby

Some of this tale relates to my brief time with 656 Squadron AAC in Kluang, Johore. Following which I leave the squadron for Sarawak with 28<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Brigade, as the new integrated regimental flights were formed in early 1965. My posting was initially with 45 Lt. Regt. RA in Malacca, Malaysia

And then we transferred our newly formed Flight to Satu Kitang, near Kuching, Sarawak. The RA detachment camped outside the main water supply works for Kuching, in case of sabotage etc..

As I was attached to 6, 40 and 45 Lt. Regts. RA over two years, I am a bit hazy as to where and when, after 53 years. I think the first posting was 45 Regt. Apologies if that is incorrect.

Having assembled our three Augusta Bell 47G's at 656 Squadron, and flight tested them, we duly sailed on the 'Rusty B' (HMS Bulwark) for Borneo. The AAC was stretched for personnel in 1965, having too many skirmishes and commitments to cope with, really. eg. Borneo, Aden, Hong Kong etc.. so we were a small mixed band of brothers. 2 New Zealand pilots, one of which was our OC, 1 RA sergeant pilot, 1 CPO Fleet Air Arm and 4 of us REME techs. It was all a bit of an unknown quantity really, working three helicopters from a jungle clearing, but help was at hand from RAF Kuching and 7/14 Flt AAC who were some 15 miles away. Things ticked along nicely, with the local Ibans building us a small hangar and office, plus a helicopter dispersal.

Our OC was keen to prove the worth of the helicopter to the CO of the RA Regt, who was probably wary of these new beasts at his disposal. Slowly we were Accepted and trips to jungle hill fort detachments ensued.

Once, in the beginning, the Colonel took me to one side before he ventured into the air and said "Corporal, you are totally sure this machine is in good shape, aren't you?"

On our second detachment, later in 1965, to 7 mile Bazaar near Kuching, our OC was keen to prove our worth to the regiment and offered to airlift a large net containing a brand new outboard motor, dozens of loaves of bread and other bits and pieces to the R&R camp on the Sarawak coast. I flew with my OC on this one. Unfortunately the the lifting beam on the Sioux was left in autorelease mode, and at 1500 feet an air pocket simulated touch down. Down plummeted the cargo net into a swamp below us! We hovered near to the hole in the swamp, I got out and with a bit of luck reattached the net to the cargo hook – up she went with a shower of filthy water, crabs, mud, the lot. We pressed on to the R&R station, related the sorry tale to the CO over the RT, and on arrival inspected the damage. Just about everything was smashed on the outboard motor, which was congealed in a mass of sliced bread etc. not a good outcome, and my OC must have felt awful about it! Hey Ho. Happy days.

Once again, apologies for any misinformation, written with good intention.

*B. Rigby ex Sgt REME*

### **Spotted stapled on to the end of a 'Summer Sales 1970' End x report.**

**We trained hard . . . But it seemed that every time we were beginning to form up into teams we would be reorganised. I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganising: and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralisation.**

**Petronius Arbitr, 210BC**

# Blades

Having just returned from a slightly extended three month tour of duty in Brunei, I was suddenly summoned to the RSM's office. (RSM Bert Baden).

With some trepidation I approached his office, attempting to work out as to what I had done wrong..

“Sit down corporal”, he said, in a friendly tone. “relax”, I told myself.

Apparently the MOD had decided that unit NAAFI clubs were no longer the ‘in’ thing, and were to be renamed as OR's clubs, run by a committee of said OR's.

The bar and catering side would still be run by the NAAFI, however the front of house was our responsibility.

“As you is the senior corporal here, I am detailing you to sort it out”, he said.

At that time I was married and living in Sunrise Park, so the tendency was to visit the swimming pool and Garrison club, rather than the unit NAAFI. So my first move was to visit the NAAFI and inspect it so that I had a clearer picture of what lay ahead..

The front of building consisted of two rooms. If my memory serves me right the room to the right was a third the size of the other room.

The following day I set about setting up a committee, my decision was to have one person from each flight/section.

My apologies to the others whose names elude me, the following ended up on the committee : Al Maloney, Barney Paradine and Baz Kavanagh are names I remember.

Every person on the committee brought individual skills, which proved to be very useful.

We held the first meeting, appointing Al Maloney as my 2i/c. and then down to business. At which, several points were made. The prime ones were that the rooms needed redecorating, the smaller room would be designated for families etc., and rather than calling it the OR's club a name was to be adopted.

As a committee we all donned overalls, scrounged paint from all and sundry and went to work. The help, input and banter of everyone made this a very enjoyable task and the basic redecoration was soon completed.

Baz Kavanagh, up to this point had been hiding a talent. He asked if he could have free rein on one of the wall sections. This had been painted a pale shade of blue. With Nothing to lose we agreed.

He picked up a pot of black paint and a four inch brush, and went to work. An hour later a silhouette appeared on the panel. Al, Barney and myself looked at each other and said, in unison, “Sabrina”. A Busty, celebrity starlet of the day.

The furniture was cleaned up and decorated, and knick knacks were purchased from the local Chinese market to adorn the rooms.

Now, the place had been transformed from a drab drinking den, to a comfortable place to enjoy oneself after a days work.

By this time we had decided that the first function would be a fancy dress ball. However we didn't have any stationery, and still no name.

A name had to be created to give it an identity, so a lot of discussion went on. Suddenly I remembered that six months previously I had been to a club in Windsor called simply 'Blazers'.

With that in mind and the fact that the last Austers were about to be retired, and the army was going mostly rotary, I suggested the name 'Blades' (without the definite article). Agreement was soon reached. A logo now had to be designed. Fortunately my oldest friend was stationed there as a Ssgt trapper. Derek (Eddie) Ford, with the Flying Instruction Element. He was a talented artist and I put the problem to him.

Two days later he gave me a drawing, which was that of an elliptical rotor disc, made up from the letters of the word 'Blades'.

## **'Blades was born'**

Invitations were sent out, and the fancy dress ball was a roaring success.

### **Footnote 1**

Shortly after this the Gurkha Air Platoons were set up. And I was allocated, on promotion, to the 7<sup>th</sup> (Duke of Edinburgh's Own) Gurkha Rifles. Leaving Al Maloney now in charge.

### **Footnote 2**

In 2005 I went to Kluang on a reunion visit. One day was set aside to visit the airfield and meet up with the new Malaysian Army Air Corps unit now on site.

As we got off the coach outside the Hangar, several of the party, who had been stationed there much later than myself, got together and wanted, before visiting the Hangar, to see what 'Blades' looked like now. None of them were aware of my involvement and I must admit to an inner feeling of self satisfaction.

**David Williams**

## *Notes from the Front Line*

Many of our members have anecdotes and stories from their time serving with 656 Squadron on operations throughout the World. Some of these operations were largely peaceful such as roulement tours in Belize, some involved securing borders such as our reinforcement of the Hong Kong Garrison in the late 1970s, others involved more hostile elements such as the ceasefire monitoring in Rhodesia. Then there were the real combat operations in Malaya, the Falklands, Afghanistan and Libya.

Wherever the Squadron served it was always with distinction and I now offer this first in what I hope will be a series in each Chinthe. So if you have any stories long or short giving snapshots our operations throughout the years, send them to me for future editions of the Chinthe. You never know we might even be able to compile a book!

I offer now for stories from Sean Bonner and Mike Kane, with whom I was privileged to serve in Scout Flight 656 Squadron AAC in the late 70s and early 80s.

*Bob Thorpe*

## *Hong Kong 1979 - Mike Kane*

*I'll start them with two stories from Hong Kong where we were sent with 2 Scouts to reinforce 660 Squadron when the Hong Garrison was being over-whelmed by thousands of illegal immigrants (IIs) crossing the border from China on a daily basis. I'll let Mike Kane take over from here.*

### **“Muddy ADC”**

Having spent most of the morning hovering around Mai Po marshes, in the trusty Scout and two equally trusty but dour Gurkha's in the rear, it was inevitable that the rear passenger compartment with ubiquitous scramble net attached would be quite muddy to say the least after picking up about 12 Chinese illegals out of the fish ponds.

Finishing my patrol around 11:30 am I was flying back to Shek Kong when the call came in to head down to HMS Tamar and pick up the C in C, Maj. General Redgrave, and bring him to Shek Kong for an award ceremony at the Gurkha base also at Shek Kong.

I indicated that this was not a good idea as the aircraft was extremely dirty and had no rear seat. The reply came back that this was not a problem as the C in C would sit in the front. However, I needed fuel and diverted into Shek Kong for a rotors running before heading off to the Island. There was a look of disdain at the rear of the aircraft from the re-fueler and handler and although I asked for at least someone to hose the rear out as it also smelled greatly of fish, I was informed there was no time and therefore I duly took off to pick up the General.

General Redgrave was quite a sociable gentleman and he had been a passenger of mine on a few occasions. He often asked if I had been to this market and that and what did I think to the price of jeans etc, etc. On those occasions he had been alone so was not too worried and I was sure my explanation of coming straight from Mai Po would be acceptable as well as beginning a conversation about the mornings work as he would also often ask.

On my approach to the helipad at Tamar I saw the General waiting but what I didn't expect was standing next to him was his ADC in full whites. I thought, "this is going to be interesting". I should explain at this point that the aircraft which was supposed to pick him up had become unserviceable at the last minute and as no other aircraft was available it was down to me, we were also running a little tight on time. I closed down and was about to disembark but the General and ground crew told me to stay in and we could start up as soon as possible.

The General climbed into the front and buckled his harness on, said "Good morning Sgt. Kane, how are you today?" as was usual. He then looked to his left where I was looking and noticed his ADC still stood by the side of the aircraft with alarm written across his face and pointing to the rear of the aircraft.

The General opened the side window and using his ADC's christian name, told him to get in the back and stop being such a ninny. I was trying not to laugh very hard and very nearly did when the General turned round to me smiling and gave me a wink. Luckily, or so I thought, one of the ground crew gave the ADC a sheet to wrap around his lower half which he duly did and strapped himself into the back very uncomfortably.

The flight to Shek Kong was uneventful as was the landing and close down. The General's staff car drove up, he said goodbye and his ADC opened the door, helping the General disembark. I was still in my seat at this time but noticed a smirk on the ground crews faces. It became obvious why when the ADC turned round and was ushering the General toward his car there was a perfect run of muddy diamonds (from the cargo net) down his back and nether regions. He of course was oblivious to this but I suspect the General had another smile to himself.

## “Rescue”



One of the least enjoyable jobs during the Illegal Immigration operations was the patrol to identify where bodies were impaled on the lobster pot spikes after the tide receded in Deep Bay. During the night many Chinese would attempt to make it to the Lau Fau Shan from the mainland using only a blow up pillow and kicking furiously against the tide and time.

I was tasked with taking a young Lieutenant on our patrol so he could appraise the situation along that coastal estuary. Accompanying me was Corporal Bill Sullivan, ex commando gunner and air gunner. There was just the usual scramble net

*Picture: Courtesy: ‘The Soldier Magazine’*

I

n the rear with the seat in its vertical position. Corporal Sullivan was ensconced in the rear, feet on skids and secured with a dispatchers harness.

It wasn’t long before we found what we thought was a body but on closer inspection it was a young man, who was not in a good way. He was shivering and looked to have the onset of hypothermia but he had luckily avoided the sharp spikes of the lobster pot stays. He was also quite well stuck in the very goeey mud, good camouflage had he really wanted it.

I discussed the situation with both the young officer and Bill Sullivan and it was decided that we should try and recover the poor unfortunate even though if successful he would be returned to China. There was always the possibility that he was also a Chinese intelligent operative although it was believed there were already many hundreds in Hong Kong and the New Territories.

The obvious way to get him out of his predicament would be to land and pull him onboard but as that was impossible it was decided that Bill would rearrange himself so that he was lying flat on his stomach with shoulders and arms over the Starboard side toward the skid. The idea being that if we got close enough without the skid touching the mud the gentleman could grab onto the skid and Bill would grab his wrists and pull him onboard.

**Assumption 1**, the the young Chinese man would have enough strength to at least reach out. -  
*Wrong*

**Assumption 2**, I was good enough to hover 2 centimetres above the mud so as not to get dirty or stuck in the mud. - *Wrong*, I misjudged my expertise.

**Assumption 3**, the young officer would be quiet while we were carrying out this delicate operation - *Wrong*. I used an expletive and asked him to be quiet while I talked to Bill during this operation, I did use “Sir” at the end as one would. I had seen the Drill Sgt’s at Sandhurst do that with excellent results.

I was basically flying blind, I couldn’t see the floor and mud over my right shoulder and was relying on Bill to guide me throughout using conning techniques and a running commentary. These instruction were also interspersed with expletives especially when he decided that the only way he was going to be able to get enough leverage to pull the guy out would be to get onto the skid. Now, Bill was not a light guy, he was stocky and powerful, so it was in hindsight a forgone conclusion that with our combined weight on the starboard side, his being toward the outer edge of the weight and balance profile, that the skid would descend into the mud.

This however allowed the Chinese gentleman to grasp at the quickly submerging skid and for Bill to grab hold of his wrist with one hand and pull part of his upper torso free of the mud.

Assumption 4 - This would now be easy. Bill would lay down in the rear so as to use both hands to pull him free and into the aircraft - *Wrong*, attempting to pull him in the aircraft only resulted in the gentleman lying on the skid with the top half of his body and the mud, resisting Bill’s attempts, to free his bottom half.

By this time the aircrafts horizontal angle by comparison to the rotor was getting a little worrying and I think that my young Lt passenger was beginning to realise this and was also looking a bit uncomfortable.

I decided to try and lift the aircraft rather than Bill trying to pull the unfortunate individual into the aircraft and briefed him to give me a running commentary on the state of the skid rising to the surface as I pulled power as well as him maintaining hold on the chinaman.

With increased power I also had to utilise as much port movement on the cyclic as I had left and initially nothing much was happening, I was getting worried. Bill suggested a bit of left and right wobble might allow air under the skid to gradually allowing it to rise to the surface. This was dually attempted and began to work. Our unfortunate chinaman was also being extracted from his mud bath which was a relief as I was at the stage of possibly having to let him go.

All of a sudden, while pulling power and with almost full port cyclic the skid came free resulting in a massive bank and climb to port. Bill had kept hold of the chinaman who literally flew into the back of the aircraft and out the other side. It was only Bill’s strength that stopped him and that he had his feet jammed in the net and one hand on the back of my seat.

I looked around to the left with great relief to see both had not disappeared out the other side but also that officer sitting next to me was quite pale and looking decidedly uncomfortable. It could be said that he learned about flying from that and probably wouldn't wish to do it again.

Having said that, I learned that when your nether regions start twitching it is a sign that it is time to get out of the situation before it is too late.

I was lucky that day and it could be said "I learned about flying from that."

## **Rhodesia 1979 - 80 - Sean Bonner**

*After Mike Kane and I returned from Hong Kong in late September, we were immediately put on standby to deploy to Rhodesia as part of the Commonwealth Monitoring Force, which ultimately led to elections in April 1980 and Mugabe becoming Prime Minister of the newly independent Zimbabwe. We had an interesting and sometimes exciting days during our time supporting the troops out the ground initially in RV points and later in various Assembly Places around the country.*

*Staying faithful to true British Military planning the Gazelle Flight, with faster aircraft and greater range, were based at Salisbury and were responsible for covering the area from Kariba – Salisbury – Umtali, about 1/4 of Rhodesia landmass. Scout Flight, slower with less range were based at Gwelo and were responsible for covering the rest of Rhodesia i.e. 3/4 of Rhodesia landmass!*

*Well, we were in Africa and not too far from Isandlwana!*

*Sean Bonner continues the story although I would like to point out that he did not get all the glamorous death-defying tasks nor was I, as flight commander, trying my best to get rid of him!!*

### **The Challenge of Aviation in Africa**

RRAF Thornhill (Gwelo) is 4,700ft above mean sea level (AMSL), add at least +30 degrees C and the Density Altitude (DA) ramps up to about 10,000ft. This means the air that the engines need is much, much higher than they were designed for.

20th December 1979. The aircraft had had their compasses swung, engines tested and we were ready to go when the Ceasefire was announced. It was decided that the Sqn QHI and 1 pilot would see how the Scout performed after an engine failure. WO2 Mick Sharp and Sgt Séan Bonner (late CSgt Para) would be the testers. At 3,000 we turned towards the designated area and entered autorotation. “Will we make the field?” asked WO2 Sharp; “Well, we’ll hit Africa” was my reply. Having been taught flying at that high DA is not good we were pleasantly surprised that the aircraft ‘floated’ on the rising hot air rather than hurtle to the ground in a death-dive. However, nearer the ground the effects of the rising hot air were completely negated by gravity and the rate of descent rose to near-suicide rates. Much frantic manipulating of the controls allowed us to hit the ground level at a very high speed then we careered across the airfield much to the astonishment of the watching Rhodesian ATC. Coming to a full stop Mick and me started breathing again. “Will you be doing any more engines off landings?” asked ATC; “No, no more”. The QHI decided that was enough, if the two most experienced pilots had a fright any more might risk damaging aircraft.

*Note - Mick Sharp was brave enough to do one engine-off with each pilot and it just showed how sturdy was the Scout as he actually broke a Gazelle doing engine-offs at Salisbury.*



## **Proving the Routes**

The route from Salisbury had already been flown therefore the Flt Comd (Capt Bob Thorpe) decided that the route to Fort Victoria, a major town SSE from Gwelo, should be tested.

Because the war was still continuing the most experienced crew (Sharp and Bonner) would fly the route.

27th December 1979. We took off with Cpl Paddy White (Local ACMN) in the rear, climbed to 3,000ft and set off for Fort Victoria. About 10 miles to the east of Gwelo was a known terrorist hot spot. As we flew over the area Paddy, leaning out and looking down announced that there were a bunch of guys on the ground and seemed to be 'puffing smoke'. Séan told Paddy that the smoke was from their AK 47 rifles and they were shooting at us. Paddy moved to the middle of the aircraft and stayed there for the rest of the flight!

## Ceasefire – start operations

No one knew what would happen after the ceasefire; communications to disparate terrorist bands (ZIPRA & ZANU) was non-existent and everyone hoped that the 'jungle drums' messages had got through. We were tasked to fly to RV Bravo at an old mission station at Zhombe to see how the process of greeting the terrorists was proceeding. As the flight was ready a message came through from Salisbury that a Puma had crashed and all on board were killed, cause unknown. I must have upset the Flt Comd in Belize a few months ago because the decision was – send Bonner.

29th December 1979. I took off with Paddy White as my crewman and flew to overhead RV Bravo at Zhombe. We circled a few times but could see no sign of movement in or around the mission house so I decided to land. We sat on the ground with the engine running just in case and noted that the mission house was sandbagged like Fort Knox, Rorke's Drift had nothing on this; the infantry Pl must have worked all night.

I shut down and we got out, walked to the mission house and called hello. A few rifles poked out and a voice of a young officer asked who were we; let's just say the exchange was somewhat heated as I explained that wearing British Army flying suits and flying a British Army helicopter just who did he think we were. Despite proving our bona fides no one came out so we had a stand off and no welcoming drink either.

No terrorists had been seen was the report but rumour had it that some were close by. Suddenly the bush parted and about 20+ heavily-armed ZIPRA came into the clearing. Their leader was a huge man covered in bandoliers, grenades with an RPG 7 over his shoulder and an AK 47 in his hands; despite the temperature being about +35 degrees centigrade he was wearing a genuine Russian fur hat complete with the Hammer-and-Sickle Star.

My 9mm pistol would be useless against 20+ armed men so I smiled, stuck out my hand and we became best mates. Eventually the infantry officer came out and the processing started. We took off and returned to Gwelo.

## The War was about to start

We received reports the the Rhodesian Army was about to start operations against a band of terrorists unless they surrendered to a Monitoring Force RV. Had this happened the whole war might have kicked off again with the lightly-armed Commonwealth Forces stuck in between. Decision from on high was to send someone to stop the war. Decision at Scout Flt was to send the expendables – Sgt Séan Bonner and Sgt Dick Kalinski, both ex-Paratroopers.

30th December 1979. We took off and headed to Salisbury to pick up a British Lt Col from the Monitoring Force Liaison (MFLO). Just why Scout Flt was being tasked into Gazelle Flight areas was not discussed. We picked up the MFLO and headed off to Grand Reef Rhodesian Base near Umtali where we we briefed that the ZANLA group were in the area of Sanmaringa, a village to the NNW. Because I was showing Dick Kalinski the ropes I started the day in the RHS as AC Commander. We arrived overhead the village and slowly descended in a gentle spiral with the MFLO waving a Union Flag out of the door. I landed and was observed by some villagers but no arms were seen. Getting frustrated I told Dick to get in my seat and I got out to speak to the villagers. The ZANLA soldiers were in the next village but were not happy.

A Gazelle appeared overhead and informed us he had a ZANLA LO on board; he was invited to land beside me. To the amusement of the villagers we had a shuffle of bodies and I put the MFLO and ZANLA LO into my Scout, told Dick to follow me and got into the Gazelle. I directed the Gazelle to the next village and we did our slow spiral with the LOs in the Scout waving their respective flags.

We landed in a village in Honde Valley but no one was willing to get out of the helicopters. Everyone looked to me. Swearing I got out and walked to a cluster of huts whereupon a bunch of armed men appeared. We had been issued with copious packs of Marlborough Light cigarettes to dish out as presents; I now handed out these cigarettes to all and sundry and became their best friend however, the ZANLA soldiers wanted to speak to their own LO. I walked back to the two aircraft and was informed that the ZANLA LO was en route to Umtali. “Go and get them” I said and both aircraft departed.

The loneliest place on earth is standing in the bush with a bunch of armed terrorists while the aircraft you signed for, and the aircraft you arrived in both disappear over the horizon. A lifetime later (about 90 minutes) the two aircraft returned and disgorged new ZANLA LOs. After much handshaking and cigarette smoking my freebee supply had run out but the rogue band agreed to go to the MF RV.

Peace restored we had to return the British MFLO and a couple of ZANLA LOs to Salisbury. Dick took three in my Scout and I got in the Gazelle with young Sgt Bennett and two ZANLA and we all returned to Salisbury. Having dropped off the passengers I refuelled and Dick and me returned to Gwelo



Crazy day. I started off RHS Scout AC Comd, later LHS Scout AC Comd then for the remainder of the operation was LHS Gazelle Mission Commander before finally going home LHS Scout.

## ***Patriot Front LO***

### **Stop the war again**

The New Year brought no let up. We were tasked to go to Buffalo Range RRAF Airfield, near the Limpopo, and pick up Archbishop Tutu and his entourage for a goodwill visit to various areas. Unsure of numbers three aircraft went to Buffalo Range AF; Capt Sam Drennan (Squadron 21/C acting as honorary Scout pilot), WO2 Mick Sharp (Squadron QHI) and me (Expendable 1) flew the three aircraft.

06th January 1980. Buffalo Range is right down in the SE of Rhodesia requiring us to refuel at Fort Victoria then another refuel at Buffalo Range. We arrived and parked close to Archbishop Tutu's HS 125; inside it was decked out like a high-class boudoir. Huddled in a group trying to guess what we would be asked to do, I had just upset the Buffalo Range Commander\* when a British MFLO came running out in a high tizzy. Seemingly at Makamne Junction, a settlement near Chibi Town, a bunch of ZANU were facing a Company of Rhodesian Infantry and fighting could soon start; goodbye Ceasefire – again. Someone had to take the British MFLO and a ZANU LO to stop them shooting at each other.

As the junior rank and junior pilot I stood back assuming my betters would toss a coin and see who went into danger. After 15 years in the Army I thought I had seen all the duplicity of the British Military command structure. No. Both Sam and Mick turned and said to me “You go”. Great, here we go again.

I took off with the two LOs and soon arrived over Makamne Junc. Looking down I saw a crazy situation. A football field with along the south side a bunch of ZANU soldiers pointing their weapons at the north side where the Rhodesian Infantry were pointing back their weapons. “Can

you land, pilot?" asked the British MFLO. Where, I said to myself; sod it and spiralled down and landed on the Centre Spot to have about 200 rifles and machine guns pointing at me.

The ZANU LO trotted off to the ZANU troops and the British MFLO trotted off to the Rhodesian troops; I sat in the centre circle and nonchalantly smoked a cigarette in true James Bond tradition. Both LOs came back to me and said neither side really trusted the LOs but would be happy with a police presence. In the middle of the African bush where does one find a policeman? Chibi Town just down the road I was informed.

Off I went, found Chibi, found the police station and landed in the compound. After much explaining two BSAP (British South Africa Police [the name the Rhodesian police were called]) agreed to come with me. We arrived over the football ground to see two neat rows of troops (ZANU & Rhodesian) lining either side of the pitch with their weapons grounded. After a discussion I was tasked to go and get the busses to take the ZANU troops to the nearest MF RV. Asking where were the busses a policeman waved vaguely to the north, "Up there somewhere". Great, I was getting low on fuel but was informed that there was a Rhodesian helicopter Fire Base not too far away and they would arrange fuel.

Late afternoon I found a convoy of busses on the side of the main road; they did not react to my gesticulating so I landed and shut down. As soon as I climbed out of my Scout a section of British troops deployed all pointing their weapons at me; whereupon I had a total sense of humour failure, I had had enough of people pointing guns at me all day. I gave the location of the pick up at Makamme Junction then flew back to the football field.

The LOs would stay with the two sets of troops and a BSAP police gave me the grid reference of the Rhodesian Fire Base. Late afternoon and I was hunting for a camouflaged encampment in Africa when luckily I saw three Rhodesian Alouette II gunships. I tagged along behind and we came to the Fire Base.

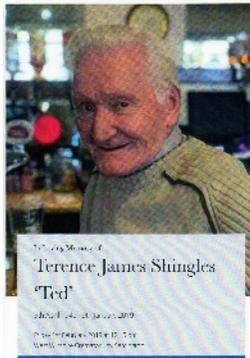
We were told, on National Radio, that all South African troops had left Rhodesia, a point of contention between Smith, Mugabe and Nkomo. As I followed the gunships into the HLS I flew past row upon row of South African armoured troop carriers, so much for radio reporting.

I shut down at the refuel point to see two South African troops running towards me brandishing knives! Not good, until I recognised them. They were two of my soldiers from my platoon when I was their Platoon Sgt in 1 Para; all they wanted were the Para wings from my shirt and flying suit! Fair exchange for some fuel.

Refuelled I knew I could only make Fort Victoria before dark so as I was about to depart the Fire Base Commander came over and asked me not to mention the South African troops, "What South African troops?" I asked.

Despite my authorisation sheet the last 15 minutes of my flight to Fort Victoria was in typical African pitch blackness. I got back to Gwelo the next day.

*\*Why I upset the Base Commander of Buffalo Range RRAF. The Base Commander caught me checking out the defences of the airfield and demanded to know what I was doing. My reply could have been more diplomatic but I told him I would have been arriving here at night 14+ years ago to capture this airfield. November 1965 and Ian Smith's declaration of UDI seemed to have upset Harold Wilson and Co. I was a Pte in C Coy, 1 Para and as Airfield Company in Bahrein we were on permanent 2 hours notice to move anywhere. C Coy was probably the most combat ready company in the Army. Since March 1965 we had been on operations in the Trucial States, Yemen (Radfan), Aden, Oman, Dhofar and Muscat. So in November 1965 we were sat under the wings of three RAF Argosy aircraft, parachutes and weapons containers to hand waiting for the Go. Our job was to drop in to Buffalo Range and capture the airfield. The remainder of the Battalion (less one company in the Radfan) would parachute/land and this would be the airhead for the recapture of Rhodesia. Two airlanding battalions would follow (whenever) and this brigade would commence the recapture of S Rhodesia. As it was politics got involved and the invasion never came to pass. The Base Commander asked me if we would have fought white Rhodesians and was not happy when I told him as Paratroopers we would fight whomsoever we were told to fight.*



**Obituary for 23234263 WO 1 (ASM), TERENCE JOHN SHINGLES.  
Ex REME. 656 Sqn Malaya, 1958 -61 and Borneo, 1967-69.**

Ted was born in Norwich, on 5<sup>th</sup> April 1940, and passed away on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 2019. His father was military, in the Royal Artillery, later transferring to REME, on formation and completing service as a WO 1 (ASM), Vehicle Artificer. Ted schooled in UK, Germany and Hong Kong, prior to enlisting.

I first met Ted when we joined the Army Apprentice School, Beachley, near Chepstow, in 1955. We were to undertake three years training to become Vehicle Mechanic's. The first six months we billeted together in HQ Company, and then in the company's. Ted was a keen sportsman playing rugby, soccer and athletics during this time. It was obvious then that Ted was a bit of a joker and loved to play tricks on us. His red hair, big grin and his Norfolk accent, always caused comment and he usually ended up chasing you.

In February 1958, we passed out of Beachley, and the new Army Air Corps had just formed, our top VM's were selected to retrain as Aircraft Mechanics, at Middle Wallop and Ted and I joined No. 10 Aircraft Mechanics Course, on completion were posted to Malaya.

We embarked on the troopship for Malaya, in Southampton, sailing via Gibraltar, where Ted was to lose his beret to an Ape. At Port Said, where we drew Ships Guard for the duration, so didn't get ashore, then on to Aden where we did get ashore. I remember Ted being amazed at so many Mercedes' Taxis! In Colombo, Ceylon, we had our first steaks, quite a treat in those days! We also walked miles to find a post office for our cards and parcels. Arriving in Singapore, we had a great night out at the Mountbatten club. The following morning early we rose early in Nee Soon, to collect our arms and ammunition for the train ride to Kuala Lumpur.

We arrived at 656 Squadron HQ, in the afternoon. Initially Ted worked in the Servicing Section, at KL Main (RAF), later he was posted to 14 Flt, at Seremban. We met up again in Kuala Lumpur, when employed on the Auster Mk 9, 'Strip and Rebuild' programme. We spent several months in a basha together and Ted ran the Wheel and Tyre Repair Bay, of the REME Workshop, which had been established. Most evenings we were in the NAAFI, recalling or listening too 'warry's' from senior or 'second tour' members, then going to 'Busties', the Char Wallah, for a cheese and onion banjo, and a glass tea before retiring. The climate was very hot and humid so we looked forward to our shower at days end. It was after one of these, when I was returning to the Basha, with only a towel around me, that Ted popped out of nowhere and tore it off! I then chased naked around an exposed quadrangle for several minutes, before recovering my towel! That was Ted's sense of fun!

Ted was then posted to 11 Flt in at RNAS, Sembawang, Singapore, where he remained until tours end, I did manage a week's leave with him in Singapore where I met a number of his naval and marine colleagues; we had a great time around the city.

Ted's tour came to an end in September 1961, it having been, I feel, the foundation for his future career. We left Malaya as corporals, sailing on the 'MV Oxfordshire,' to Southamton, this time calling in at Cyprus, to embark the 1<sup>st</sup> Devon and Dorset Regt, which we disembarked at Plymouth. On arrival, we journeyed to Waterloo, with all our kit, we had a few pints and left for our homes, Ted to Plumstead, where his parents had settled, his father being employed with the MoD Police, at Woolwich.

We reported to Middle Wallop, in the November, Ted being employed in the Station Workshop, AACC, at 2<sup>nd</sup>. He later moved to 6 Flight, the VIP, Alouette, Flight. We played rugby together at Wallop, and he met Betty, a WRAC girl supporter, who became his wife in 1962, later they had two sons David and Paul, I used to visit on odd week ends, in Andover, when I was on artificer course.

Ted undertook his Artificer training in 1965/66, being promoted to SSgt, on completion. He finished in the Army, as a Warrant Officer, Class 1 (Artificer Sergeant Major). He served for over 27 years, 24 with REME Aviation. His conduct was Exemplary, and he was awarded the GSM's for, Malaya and Borneo. He also was awarded the Pingat Jasa Malaysia, by the Malaysian government, for service during the peninsular and Malaysian emergency and confrontation. Later he received a 'Letter of Commendation' from the GOC 3 Division and British Ambassador for Ethiopia, for his work there with 665 Squadron. During his service Ted also served in the UK, Brunei, Northern Ireland, Canada, BAOR, Cyprus and Jamaica with the JDF.

He was a pleasant, polite, cheerful character, who was always smart and well turned out. He was a fine example to his subordinates, and a fair and well respected disciplinarian. His trade knowledge was extensive. His technical experience, expertise, and the guidance and enthusiasm shown for the young technicians, proved him to be a loyal, hardworking and conscientious junior manager.

During my service, I met him again when he returned from Brunei; when he was at 73 Ac Wksp, at Celle, and at 665 Sqn LAD, in Colchester. He relieved me as Chief Aircraft Artificer, at 3 Cdo Bde Air Sqn, Plymouth. He then was my shopfloor ASM, at 70 Ac Wksps, in 1988, for two years. By then he had married Cathy, and had two, boys. In the interim, whenever we were in UK, Fran and I would visit them at home and catch up on things and the Dog!

*Ted was a great pal, who held strong opinions, and if he didn't like you he told you so! He always had a smile on his face. But for conversing and recalling days gone by, you couldn't better him. Many times later, in the Legion Club, at Westbury, we relived past events, again and again.*

*He leaves his sons Kevin and Trevor, with their families, and grandchildren, who I'm sure, will miss him sorely, as will I, too. For though we were apart often, we never forgot each other, or all the trials, and hardships we had endured, and the happy moments we had had together.*

**May you rest in peace Ted? You are not forgotten!**

## In Memoriam

Between late 2017 and early 2019 we were saddened to lose the following friends and colleagues, who all served in 656 Squadron:

### **OCTOBER 2017**

Colonel (Retired) Stephen Nathan, who commanded 656 Squadron 1978 to 1981. He led the Squadron during Op Agila in Rhodesia

### **NOVEMBER 2017**

Captain (Retired) Keith Edward Bush RA, who served with 656 in Malaya both as a line pilot and 11 Flight Commander.

### **MARCH 2018**

Joe Benn RA, who served in 7 Flight in Benta and Taiping during 1953-54

Capt (retired) V G Finch REME/AAC, who served in 656 Kluang 1963-65 and at Netheravon from 1985-86

WO1 (ASM) Ralph Purcell, who served with the Squadron in Malaya following his aircraft mechanic course in 1958 and after his Artificer course in 1960.

Captain (Retired) Ted Maslen-Jones DFC MC RA. One of original Burma veterans, whose obituary was published in the last Chinthe.

### **MAY 2018**

Brigadier (Retired) Conan Carey, late RCT, who served in 14 Flight in Seremban, Kluang and Brunei and in 20 Flight in Hong Kong 1964-65

### **JUNE 2018**

Alfred Howard RAF, who was one of our last Burma veterans

### **AUGUST 2018**

Major (retired) Chris Crouch DFC AAC (Also RTR and GPR), who served in 656 in Singapore, KL, Sandakan and KK from 1956 -59

### **NOVEMBER 2018**

J R Graham RAF, who served with SHQ in Sembawang and 14 Flight in Kluang between 1947 and 49

### **DECEMBER 2018**

Major (Retired) Tim Deane RA/AAC, who served in Borneo between 1962 and 63

Len Edgecock REME, who was Mentioned in Dispatches and served with 14 Flight in Seremban, Kluang and Brunei

### **JANUARY 2019**

Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Bruce Leece, who served with SHQ at Noble Field, 7 Flight in Taiping and 14 Flight in Seremban

Ted Shingles REME, who served on with the Squadron in Malaya between 1958 and 61 and 1965 and 68.

**REST IN PEACE, GENTLEMAN. YOUR DUTY IS DONE**

## **New Members**

We welcomed the following new members since we published the last edition of the Chinthe.

**Jackie PritchardDavies**, the widow of Major Michael Pritchard Davies who served in 656 in Malaya between 1959 and 61

**Mike Oates RA**, who served with 7 Flight in Taiping between 1959 and 60

**Scott Robertson AAC**, who served with 656 in Dishforth, Wattisham and Afghanistan between 2005 and 10

## **Your Committee**

As we have detailed in a separate article, the committee has decided that we need to create the post of Chairperson to take on the day-to-day management of the Association, with the support of the committee. The President will be more of a figure-head role and, as such, whenever possible, should be a former Officer Commanding. In particular the Chairperson will be responsible for growing the membership of the Association. Bob Thorpe has agreed to take on this role until the AGM on 21st June when the membership will be given the chance to ratify the position.

### **Your committee is therefore:**

*President - Pier Lewis*

*Chairperson - Bob Thorpe*

*Secretary - Terry Betchley*

*Treasurer - George McKie*

*Membership secretary - bob Thorpe*

*Assistant Treasurer and Auditor - Derek Walker*

*Webmaster - Mike Kane*

*Chinthe Editor - Dave Williams*

If you wish to contact any member of the committee please drop an email or phone either Bob Thorpe ([bobthorpe341@gmail.com](mailto:bobthorpe341@gmail.com) or 07935 796164) or Terry Betchley ([t.betchley@sky.com](mailto:t.betchley@sky.com) or 07796 671462)

In addition, Mark Meaton has kindly agreed to continue in the role of our Archivist but will not generally take part in the day-to-day activities of the Committee.

The committee members have agreed to put themselves forward to continue in the above positions for 2019/20 although Dave Williams has stated he only wishes to be the Chinthe Editor on a temporary basis.

Please let the Secretary know of you wish to be nominated or wish to nominate another member for any of the above positions.

